

Where Meth Goes ...

Violence and Destruction Follow



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Methamphetamine

Characteristics

- ❖ Methamphetamine – a powerful, long-acting, physical and psychological stimulant. Known by a variety of street names - *meth, speed, crank, crystal, CR, vitamin C, ice, go-fast, chalk and glass*.
- ❖ Often powdery, meth may be found in a variety of colors and it may emit a chemical odor.
- ❖ Meth is swallowed, snorted, injected or smoked.
- ❖ Meth is a highly addictive drug.

Symptoms

- ❖ Short-term use can result in increased heart rate, blood pressure and respiration; excessive sweating; flushed or tense appearance; a chemical odor on the breath; rapid speech; dilated pupils; bloodshot eyes; and inability to sleep or eat.
- ❖ Prolonged use can cause severe physical and psychological problems, including permanent damage. (Chronic users are also known as *tweakers*.)
- ❖ Physical symptoms include severe weight loss, rotting teeth, scars, and open sores (hallucinations cause the user to scratch or gouge at imaginary “bugs”¹). Body odor can be offensive since the chemicals used to manufacture meth are excreted in the perspiration and personal hygiene becomes less important as use progresses.

Behavioral problems

- ❖ Meth can overwhelm and overstimulate the user’s nervous system, creating serious psychological/behavioral problems, including violence, aggression and hyperactivity.
- ❖ Chronic meth users experience any or all of the following: *initial euphoria* – a feeling of well-being; *depression* – feelings of sadness; *paranoia* – a chronic psychosis characterized by delusions of persecution or of grandeur; and *aggressive behavior* leading to violence.

Addiction

- ❖ Meth modifies the brain’s pleasure receptors by producing excess levels of dopamine, a natural chemical found in the brain. With prolonged use, the user’s ability to experience normal levels of pleasure declines significantly. The user suffers extreme boredom with normal day-to-day activities.
- ❖ Meth creates a powerful craving in the user. The psychological urge to use meth can cause a user to become dependent on the drug. Many young users either ignore or are unaware of the paranoia, brain damage or violence associated with meth use.

¹ U.S. DOJ, National Drug Intelligence Center, Dec. 1996, p. 10.

Clandestine labs – environmental damage and health risks

- ❖ Across California, people manufacture drugs in clandestine drug laboratories. *Clan labs* are mini-chemical labs that make illegal drugs quickly and cheaply. In California, most clan labs produce meth.
- ❖ Experts estimate that meth production leaves five pounds of waste, often toxic, for every pound of meth produced.²
- ❖ Clean-up of the toxic waste is expensive; in 1997, California taxpayers spent \$8 million to clean up 1,600 clan lab sites.³
- ❖ People operating clan labs show little concern about the dangers posed by toxic chemicals used in meth production – they dump toxic chemical waste and garbage in our waterways, along highways, in fields, down drains or near schools. The potential contamination of groundwater poses a significant public health risk.
- ❖ More than 30 chemicals are used to produce meth. Many are explosive, caustic and are known carcinogens.
- ❖ In California, 1,006 clan labs were seized by the state Department of Justice's Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement (BNE) agents in 1998. A large majority were meth labs.

Meth and child endangerment

- ❖ In 1998, BNE agents found 370 children at California meth labs. Often, the children are under the age of 13. Many children found at meth lab sites test positive for exposure to toxic substances.⁴

Prevention

- ❖ Studies indicate that drug use often begins at about age 12 or 13.⁵ Violence is often associated with drug use, so we must use appropriate prevention strategies to target youth drug use.
- ❖ Current research shows a need for collaborative prevention strategies – by law enforcement, the community, schools and local governments – to reduce problems caused by drug use.⁶ Prevention messages presented in homes, in schools and through community activities can create the awareness required to stop the problems and criminal activity associated with meth.

² "Meth hits in a big way," *Daily News* newspaper, Los Angeles, Sept. 27, 1998.

³ *Sacramento Bee* newspaper, July 31, 1998.

⁴ "Clandestine Labs: Protecting the Environment and Community," *Conference Proceedings*, National Methamphetamine Drug Conference, sponsored by the Office of National Drug Control Policy, May 1997.

⁵ "Addiction is a Brain Disease – and It Matters," *National Institute of Justice Journal*, Oct. 1998, p. 4.

⁶ *Sixth Biennial Statewide Survey of Drug and Alcohol use Among California Students in Grades 7, 9 and 11*, Greg Austin and Rodney Skager, May 1998.